

## **Croatia**

### **Facts and Statistics**

**Location:** Southeastern Europe, bordering the Adriatic Sea, between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia

**Capital:** Zagreb

**Climate:** Mediterranean and continental; continental climate predominant with hot summers and cold winters; mild winters, dry summers along coast

**Population:** 4,493,312 (July 2007 est.)

**Ethnic Make-up:** Croat 89.6%, Serb 4.5%, other 5.9% (including Bosniak, Hungarian, Slovene, Czech, and Roma) (2001 census)

**Religions:** Roman Catholic 87.8%, Orthodox 4.4%, other Christian 0.4%, Muslim 1.3%, other and unspecified 0.9%, none 5.2% (2001 census)

### **Language in Croatia**

The Croatian language is a South Slavic language which is used primarily by the inhabitants of Croatia as well as Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatian is based on the Ijekavian pronunciation of the Stokavian dialect (with some influence from Čakavian and Kajkavian) and written with the Croatian alphabet.

German and English are the most common second languages. French, Italian, Czech and Hungarian are also spoken.

### **Croatian Society and Culture**

#### **Croats**

The majority of the population are Croats. Minorities include Serbs, Hungarians and Gypsies. The population is predominantly Roman Catholic, although there are Christian Orthodox, Muslim, and Jewish minorities, mostly living in Zagreb.

#### **Religion**

The Catholic Church plays a large role in Croatian society. Historically, the clergy played a pivotal role in the country's education and culture. Under Communist rule The Church had difficult relations with the authorities, constantly remaining loyal to Rome. Between 1945 and 1952, many priests were shot or imprisoned.

After communism was defeated, the church slowly started to re-create its once prominent role in people's lives. Croats are especially devoted to the Blessed Virgin (called "Gospa"). There are sanctuaries throughout the country built in her honour. Each village and town has a patron saint and that saint's feast day is celebrated with a procession and church ceremony. Some villages still have a traditional bonfire on their patron saints' day. Many professionals also have their own patron saint.

#### **Nationalists**

Croats are extremely proud of their heritage and culture and are thus staunch nationalists. They call their country "Our Beautiful Homeland" ("Lijepa naša"), which is also the title of the national anthem.

The sense of nationalism comes both from their long and rich culture as well as a legacy of foreign invasion and control.

Folklore plays a key role in preserving the culture. Life experiences are translated into verse, poetic songs, melodies, fairy tales, symbolic rituals, music, dance, costumes, and jewellery. Folksongs and poems often attest to the sentiment and regard between family members.

### **A Family Orientated People**

The family is still the basis of the social structure. The extended family is the norm and relatives remain quite close with both the mother and the father's sides. The family provides its members with a social network and assistance in times of need. Even though it is becoming increasingly common for the nuclear family to have its own house, Croatians will take in elderly parents rather than send them to a nursing home. Weekends are considered family time. Few Croatians will allow business concerns to interfere with this important part of their lives.